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REMARKS

Applicants would first acknowledge and the thank the Examiner for the courtesies granted their agent during a telephone interview granted their attorney March 29, 2006, at which time the primary reference, Meckstroth, was discussed.

In the simplest of terms, the broader aspects of Applicants' invention are found in the elimination of load bearing posts, or frame element, as a component of foam core panels that are to be joined and form a composite assembly. Characterized differently, in previous foam core assemblies, each panel comprised a structural, load carrying frame member, or post, integrated into its structure. These posts were then maintained in abutting relation by a load carrying connector. The load carrying functions of such joining "mechanism" are provided by the frame-to-connector-to-frame "mechanism" and the foam cores of the panels of the respective panels are essentially isolated from the joining "mechanism".

Meckstroth is typical of prior art, practice. Meckstroth seeks to facilitate the joining of prefabricated foam core panel modules (10) that are joined to form various parts and portions of a building on site. The end result is a building, wherein the modules become a permanent part of the realty.

Each prefabricated module (10) of Meckstroth (Figs. 1 and 2) comprises a vertical sheet of plywood (14) secured to one lateral surface of a polyethylene foam core (18) to form the structure for the exterior wall component of the building. A sheet of drywall (16) is secured to the opposite lateral surface of the foam core (18) to form the interior wall component of the prefabricated wall module. As taught by Meckstroth, adjacent modules (10) are maintained in assembled, side-by-side relation through the provision of wooden frame posts (12), to which define the abutting side edges assembled modules. Meckstroth

then provides a joint device (30), which engages undercut slots (20) formed respectively in the abutted edge surfaces of the of the frame posts (12).

The joining "mechanism" that holds the two modules in assembled relation is thus the connection from the undercut surface of one post (12), through the joint device (30) to the undercut surface of the adjoining post (12). The foam material core is wholly isolated from the joining mechanism thus provided.

Applicants depart from the teachings of Meckstroth in that the foam material is a component of the joining mechanism and serves the function that is provided by the posts (12) of Meckstroth. Pursuant to applicants' teachings (and claims), adjacent panels (16) have side edge portions which are defined by the slab of foamed plastic of which panel is comprised. These side edge portions are engaged in abutting relation, when in assembled relation. The joining mechanism then comprises undercut slots formed in the foamed plastic edge portions of the foam slab. These panels are then maintained in assembled, side-by-side relation through the provision of a joining member inserted into said slots and having retaining surfaces respectively engaging the undercut surfaces of said slots.

While Meckstroth does employ undercut slots in his joining "mechanism", the distinction is found in the fact that Applicants attain such end <u>without</u> the additional post component taught by Meckstroth and others.

This distinction is further evidenced by the fact that the foam material of the foam slab [which overlies the retaining member, and extends outwardly to the abutted edge surface of the panel] is the portion of the panel which is stressed in resisting separation of the assembled panels. In contrast, in Meckstroth, it is the material of the frame posts (12) which is stressed in resisting separation of the modules (10).

Figs. 3 and 4 of Meckstroth illustrate an alternate form of connector, in which a joint device is mounted on one module (10) and a slot provided on the module to which it is to be joined. The components of this alternate version are even less capable of responding to the limitations of the claims, and are likewise distinguished in that post like frame elements 55 and 70 are provided to withstand the forces of separation in maintaining the modules in assembled relation.

From a method standpoint, Applicants' joining process is predicated in longitudinally introducing the joining member into the undercut slots. To the contrary, Meckstroth is predicated on a lateral introduction of the joint device – in fact this is understood to be a central theme of his invention.

The Examiner questioned the applicability of Applicants' arguments in light of their embodiment of Figs. 6 and 8. Actually this embodiment brings into focus the fact that Meckstroth deals with a distinctly different art. He is concerned with items that form the structural components of a building. He is interested in effecting a one time connection between modules which are permanently attached and incorporated and subsumed in the realty. Applicants on the other hand, are dealing with chattel items that may be employed in exhibitions halls or the like and are continually being assembled and disassembled at one geographic location and then another. The provision of a solid polymer wear-surface for the undercut grooves protects the integrity of the grooves as retaining members are repeatedly inserted into and then withdrawn from the retaining slots.

The Examiner also questioned the advantages gained by elimination of the structural load bearing posts. The elimination of this component from the compositely formed panels provides an obvious saving in costs of manufacture. This is significant and offers a reward

potential more than sufficient to provide an incentive for improvement in the field of joining foam core panels.

It is also worthy of note that when this art sought a solution to join foam core panels in fabricating chattels, they did in fact turn to the conventional approach represented by Meckstroth. That is, the foam core panels were mounted within a wooden frame, so that the abutting side portions of the panels were comprised of structural post. A mechanical connection was then provided between these posts to effect a connection between the panels, with the foam material being isolated from the connection mechanism.

In illustrating uniqueness, perhaps the most significant advantage of the invention is in found in the ability to custom-fit panels on a remote site. Since the width of the panels is defined by edge portions of foam material, it is a simple matter to remove a portion of the width of the panel to obtain a desired dimension. Slots can then be cut along the length of the newly formed edge surface.

Such on-site custom fitting in a post-to-post joined panels, is impractical at best. In one fashion or another, a post must be reattached to a foam core of reduced width and the veneer reattached and trimmed. An alternative providing a limited degree of adjustment would be to provide excessively wide posts which could be narrowed and the post-to-post connecting means reestablished. Much greater flexibility is provided through applicants' elimination of frame member posts.

Independent article claim 33 and independent method claim 58 have been amended to better distinguish over Meckstroth and in so doing to set forth the broader aspects of Applicants' in terms of coextensive scope.

As now amended, in both claims, the panels are defined:

(33) each panel comprises a foam slab of foamed plastic material having opposed lateral surfaces spaced apart by the thickness of the slab, the lateral surface area of the panel being defined at least in part by the lateral surface area of the slab, and veneers, respectively bonded to the lateral surfaces of the slab, and each panel has an abutting surface formed and defined by a portion of the its foam slab, and means for joining said panels with said abutting surfaces held in engaged relation, slots formed, respectively, in said foam slabs, said slots extending inwardly from said abutting surfaces,	(58) each panel comprises a foam slab of foamed plastic material having opposed lateral surfaces spaced apart by the thickness of the slab, the lateral surface area of the panel being defined at least in part by the lateral surface area of the slab, and veneers, respectively bonded to the lateral surfaces of the slab and; each panel has an abutting surface formed and defined by a portion of its foam slab, characterized in that the slab of each panel has a slot formed therein and extending inwardly from the abutting surface thereof, each slot being undercut to form retaining surfaces facing away from the abutting surface in which it is formed,

These claims further specify that the defined "abutting surfaces" are in or brought into "abutting and engaged relation". It is believed that these claims not only avoid any reading in terms on Meckstroth, but clearly and patentably distinguish thereover, in defining a joining mechanism for foam core panels which eliminates a post or frame member as a component thereof.

Other pending claims have been amended to conform to the amendments made in independent claims 33 and 58 as well as to provide proper antecedent bases for several of the terms employed in connection with relationships defined. All to the end of making the

claims more accurate. The additional, amended claims are 38, 47, 50, 59-61.

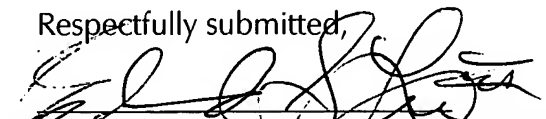
It was the understanding of Applicants' agent that the Examiner felt that, subject to further review, a prima facie case had been made for overcoming rejections based on Meckstroth. Accordingly discussion of other grounds of rejection was not reached. Applicants, do however, make of record their position that the remaining claims rejected in the previous Office Action additionally distinguished the prior art in defining patentable subject matter.

Claims previously withdrawn from consideration have been canceled.

It is now believed the application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, withdrawal of the Final Action and allowance of the application, as now presented are respectfully requested.

Reconsideration and allowance of the application as now presented are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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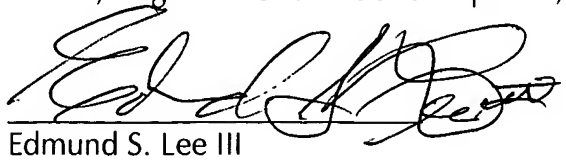
CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that the foregoing and accompanying, separate Claim Amendments were deposited with the United States Postal Service, prepaid first class mail, addressed to the Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 on April 10, 2006.



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